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SUBJECT: EAP A/S CAMPBELL'S MEETING WITH MND/FAO MG QIAN
LIHUA, OCTOBER 14

Classified By: Political Minster Counselor Aubrey Carlson. Reasons 1.4
(b/d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Major General Qian Lihua, Director of the Foreign Affairs Office of China's Ministry of Defense, responded positively, if cautiously, to EAP A/S Campbell's urging of improved military-to-military relations within a broader, inter-agency strategic dialogue, but complained that restrictions imposed by the United States make such advances difficult. Meeting with A/S Campbell October 14, MG Qian pointed specifically to the 2000 National Defense Authorization Act, U.S. arms sales to Taiwan, continued "Tiananmen sanctions" and U.S. treatment of China "as a threat" as obstacles to improved mil-mil ties. A/S Campbell stressed the importance of viewing bilateral military ties from a broader perspective, said the U.S. is looking to remove obstacles to improved humanitarian, search-and-rescue and anti-piracy cooperation, made clear U.S. interest in peace and stability in the region and expressed support for positive PRC-Taiwan relations. End Summary.

Broader Context for Mil-Mil Relations

¶2. (C) In an October 14 meeting with Major General Qian Lihua, Director of the Foreign Affairs Office of China's Ministry of Defense, EAP A/S Campbell stressed the need to move beyond the usual military exchanges and high-level visits, as important as they were, to seek effective measures to build greater trust and confidence between the two militaries. A/S Campbell proposed that the next phase of military-to-military relations proceed within the framework of a broader strategic dialogue and that it involve key players from other Government agencies, particularly the State Department and China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. A/S Campbell noted Deputy Secretary Steinberg's recent speech calling for the development of bilateral relations through comprehensive dialogue, including between the military establishments of the two countries, and within a new framework of "strategic reassurance."

¶3. (C) Major General Qian responded that China had "taken note" of the Deputy Secretary's speech on "strategic reassurance." He responded positively, if cautiously, to A/S Campbell's proposal for the two militaries to engage in strategic dialogue within a broader, multi-agency framework. Qian stated that the PLA agreed that military-to-military talks should take place within the broader context of bilateral relations, was willing to expand the military dialogue to include agencies other than the military, and welcomed more talks with the State Department. These efforts, he said, would contribute to better understanding even if they did not resolve all the problems. The modernization of the Chinese military would not take place to

the detriment of U.S. interests, he asserted, and the two sides needed to work together more extensively in more areas.

14. (C) Qian stated that the PLA was already participating in strategic dialogue through various working groups and Track-II (i.e., non-government exchanges) fora, including some this month, the purpose of which was to "reduce mistrust." Qian said he hoped these dialogues would push bilateral relations forward or they "will have been a waste of time." He agreed with A/S Campbell's observation that although a Track-II approach was of great importance in building confidence, it was not sufficient to move beyond present obstacles and could not replace Track I (i.e., government-to-government dialogue).

Mil-Mil Relations: "Burden is on the U.S."

15. (C) Qian noted the high-level military visits currently scheduled and under consideration but stated that although military-to-military relations were doing quite well, the military relationship still lagged considerably behind U.S.-China state-to-state relations. Qian launched into the PLA's standard litany of assertions regarding obstacles to improved military relations as a result of U.S. actions, namely legal restrictions on military cooperation contained in the National Defense Authorization Act of 2000 and U.S. arms sales to Taiwan. He said China wished to work with the United States to bring mil-mil relations in line with state-state relations but "expects" greater efforts from the United States to remove these obstacles. He maintained that

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these obstacles were amplified by virtue of the fact that the United States had never formally lifted sanctions imposed in the wake of Tiananmen in 1989.

16. (C) The National Defense Authorization Act of 2000, Qian claimed, had been very detrimental to efforts to advance military relations and remained a serious impediment to further progress. He said the legislation had been cited by the United States in recent discussions of next year's arrangements for military exchanges as a reason for not going further. How could China pursue military-to-military relations in the face of these constraints, Qian asked rhetorically. He asked for the elimination of these restrictions.

17. (C) Turning to the Taiwan issue, Qian said that cross-Strait relations were improving and were "moving in the right direction" but could be derailed if the United States did not adhere to the 1982 joint communique, which "called for an eventual end to arms sales." He said the U.S. argument that it was simply supporting a military balance in the Strait did not hold up in the long run because given the vast differences in territory, population and economic clout of the two sides, "the balance cannot last forever." Qian complained in particular about what he maintained was a continuing pattern of the United States announcing new weapons sales to Taiwan or "military-to-military relations with Taiwan" each time U.S.-China military relations were restored and began to develop smoothly.

18. (C) Finally, Qian reiterated China's standard line that its military buildup was defensive in nature and did not threaten the interests of other powers. He said the United States did not believe this, so it treated China as a threat, with the result that China was not enthusiastic about promoting military-to-military relations in such an environment. In today's complex international environment, extensive and constructive military exchanges and cooperation were essential in order to handle traditional and non-traditional threats. If the United States did not lift its restrictions on military exchanges, such cooperation could not happen, Qian said.

¶9. (C) A/S Campbell responded that it was important to view the U.S. military relationship with China from a broader perspective than that adopted by Qian in his remarks. A/S Campbell noted that the United States had played an important role in China's impressive economic development over the past 30 years by keeping U.S. markets open to China and by providing a guarantee of peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region. A/S Campbell pointed out that PLA strategic literature was replete with references to the United States as an enemy and emphasized that while the United States took China's defensive strategic doctrine seriously, there needed to be a significant role for the U.S. military to play in the Asia-Pacific. This, he said, required a robust partnership with the PLA to be successful.

¶10. (C) The Administration was reviewing those aspects of U.S. legislation that impeded better military-to-military relations on a range of issues with an eye in particular to removing obstacles to coordinated military responses to humanitarian needs, joint search-and-rescue operations, and anti-piracy cooperation, A/S Campbell explained.

¶11. (C) With respect to the Taiwan issue, A/S Campbell underscored to Qian that the United States had provided "public and enthusiastic" support to the new direction of cross-Straits relations and had made the same point to Taiwan quietly. He said that the overriding objective of U.S. policy was not an artificially imposed military equality but peace and stability in the Strait and region. China's diplomacy vis-a-vis Taiwan had helped to promote this, he stated, so in that respect U.S. and Chinese interests were in alignment.

¶12. (C) The meeting concluded with A/S Campbell and Major General Qian agreeing to continue their dialogue and especially to think about constructive, concrete steps that could be taken to build trust and to reflect on the new concepts discussed in their meeting.

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¶13. (U) The delegation cleared this cable.
HUNTSMAN